

WORKERS

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THE HEALTH OF THE NATION

NHS Raise pay to keep staff

Water Dirty rich

Covid-19 Listen to workers

Net zero Dogma rules

Housing Empty promises

London Who runs it?

Crisis Capitalism the problem *plus* Historic Notes,

Review How the NHS was won News and more

WORKERS



Back to school – a national priority

TO MANY people it will seem obvious that there is a strong correlation between school attendance and exam attainment – and that school attendance is essential for both personal attainment and a key part of developing the skills we need as a nation.

The exam link is borne out by official figures from 2019 – 68 per cent of all pupils passed their English and Maths GCSEs, but for pupils who were persistently absent – missing 10 per cent or more of their lessons – the figure was only 36 per cent.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, school absences in England averaged around 4.7 per cent. According to Department for Education data, this rose to 7.5 per cent in the academic year 2021/2022.

But the data is even more worrying when focused on pupils who are persistently absent, especially given the consequences to their futures and to our future as a nation.

The proportion of school pupils who were persistently absent from school rose from 10.5 per cent in 2018-2019 to 22.3 per cent in 2021/2022. This is around 1.6 million children out of a total school population of seven million in England.

The most recent figures on attendance, from September 2022 to March 2023, show no improvement. They suggest that 22.6 per cent of pupils were persistently absent – more than one in five are still missing out on their education.

Much of this is due to the government’s response to the pandemic. It is the inevitable, pre-

dictable and predicted result of the catastrophic decision to lockdown the whole of society, including our schools. All the authority figures – government, health officials, teacher unions – told pupils that it didn’t matter if they didn’t go to school.

Established procedures for quickly contacting parents when children were absent from school went out of the window. Teachers struggled to deliver what they could online and to identify individual needs. It wasn’t enough. The result: children lost months and months of education; they lost all the opportunities that schools afford for cooperation and development; they lost contact with each other.

The government wrings its hands about a shrinking workforce. It has increased the number and range of jobs designated as shortage occupations. For example, jobs open to overseas workers on Skilled Worker Visas now include bricklayers, joiners, plasterers, and roofers.

Every September hails the start of a new school year, but this year “Pupils Back to School” should be a national priority. Teachers, parents, local authorities must do all they can to make this happen.

The wider lesson is that a culture of being in a place with other people, of working with other people, is vital to society. That is the only way to be educated, the only way to thrive in life and work.

We are social beings, not virtual presences. For schoolchildren and adults alike, working in isolation from home is not the way forward.



Cover photo Monkey Butler Images/shutterstock.com



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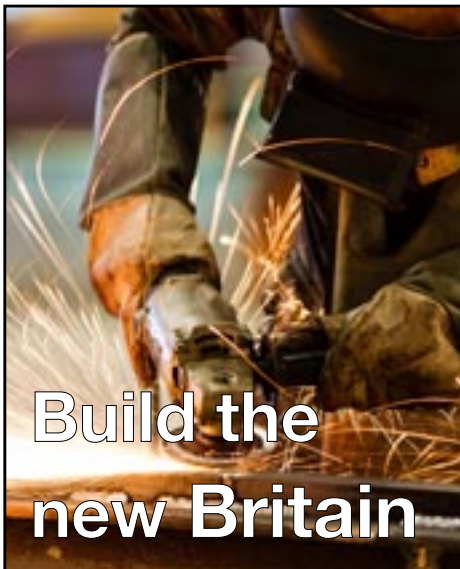
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Workers

Queuing for a window at the ticket office, Sheffield.

Ticket office fight continues

ON 16 AUGUST protests took place across Britain against plans to shut our railway ticket offices. These were part of the RMT union’s continuing campaign “Save Ticket Offices”.

There were demonstrations at more than 30 stations, including Euston, Glasgow, Leeds, Halifax, Sunderland, Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham. Members of the public joined the RMT demonstrations. This is set to be followed by a march and rally in London on Thursday 31 August on the eve of the closure of consultations. These were initially for three weeks only, but now run until 1 September.

The fear is that the consultation outcome is a foregone conclusion, but the RMT is encouraging the public to respond anyway. By mid-August 400,000 responses had been received.

The government has ordered train operating companies to start closing all the ticket offices. The closures would worsen passenger service, accessibility, safety and security, and restrict passengers’ access to the best value tickets.

The closures would lead to the de-staffing of stations. The Association of British Commuters has found that in the West Midlands alone, 137 stations would be left unstaffed.

The RMT regularly publishes pictures on its social media showing the public using ticket offices. It doesn’t have to look hard to find them. ■

WALES

Spending to be slashed

SPENDING ON public services in Wales will be cut to deal with a £900 million gap in its £20 billion budget.

First Minister Mark Drakeford is asking ministers to find cuts not from themselves and their high expenses but from public spending: the people of Wales must pay.

A statement from Drakeford on WalesOnline blames everything on the UK government. Nothing is ever his fault. An underspend of about £155 million last year went back to the UK Treasury because it cannot be carried forward. At the time the Welsh government was blamed for “poor record keeping and mismanagement of public accounts”. Nothing has been learnt.

There is no mention yet of where the cuts would fall. All areas are threatened. Perhaps Drakeford could save money by reversing plans for a big increase in Senedd members – that would save at least £12 million a year. Turnout for Senedd elections is under 40 per cent anyway. And the latest plans for a blanket 20 mph urban speed limit will cost £32 million over 5 years. ■

FACTS MATTER

At *Workers* we make every effort to check that our stories are accurate, and that we distinguish between fact and opinion.

If you want to check our references for a particular story, look it up online at cpbml.org.uk and follow the embedded links. If we’ve got something wrong, please let us know!

If you have news from your industry, trade or profession call us on 07308 979308 or email workers@cpbml.org.uk



ON THE WEB

A selection of additional stories at cpbml.org.uk

Teachers' resounding victory

The conclusion of the current teachers' pay dispute has seen a resounding victory for schools in England and the unions involved, and has secured their biggest single pay rise in 30 years. The settlement was overwhelmingly endorsed by union members.

Stubborn inflation

The rise in the consumer prices index in the year to July, was a little lower than June – but prices are still rising faster than they have done for years.

Packaging workers fight for pay and conditions

Doncaster packaging workers began a 4-week strike on 14 August. They have rejected employer's 8 per cent offer, tied to longer hours and worse conditions.

Making people vote in Wales

Turnout for elections to the Senedd Cymru (the devolved Welsh parliament) is low. Welsh politicians are seeking compulsory voting instead of asking themselves why voters don't bother.

Britain's crippling debt

Government debt headlines when it goes up or when the government says it wants to reduce it. The level of debt has spiralled out of control, and capitalism has no answer.

Plus: the e-newsletter

Visit cpbml.org.uk to sign up to your free regular copy of the CPBML's electronic newsletter, delivered to your email inbox. The sign-up form is at the top of every website page – an email address is all that's required.

Workers



11 August: striking doctors picketing outside Whipps Cross University Hospital, London.

Mixed progress for doctors

JUNIOR DOCTORS in Scotland have voted overwhelmingly to accept a pay offer. In a ballot nearly 82 per cent voted for the deal on a 71 per cent turn-out.

The offer gives an increase of 12.4 per cent backdated to April of this year. There is also a commitment for negotiations in the following three years to make “credible progress” towards pay restoration to 2008 levels. That's the demand of the junior doctors' campaign throughout Britain.

The deal also removes junior doctors in Scotland from the Doctors and Dentists Pay Review Body, and includes measures to improve working and training conditions. That looks an important step. Nurses and other NHS staff in England are seeking to move away from pay review bodies.

In Wales, hospital doctors of all grades are to be balloted on industrial action. The devolved administration in Wales made the lowest offer anywhere in the UK – 5 per cent for 2023-24.

In England, junior doctors concluded their fifth round of strikes in mid-August. They are re-balloting for a mandate for further action. Separately, hospital consultants are holding their third round of strikes on 24 and 25 August.

The government position, for public consumption at least, is that there will be no further talks while industrial action continues. But it seems likely there are informal contacts between government and the unions – the BMA and the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association.

In the course of pay struggles by other health workers this year, it became clear that workers are up against the state. Pay review bodies are discredited and despised, and those workers who have secured victories have done so through strong local organisation, clarity about the importance of maintaining national negotiating structures, and tactical inventiveness. Junior doctors and consultants will need the same to make progress towards pay restoration. ■

UNIVERSITIES Strikes to resume

THE UNIVERSITY and College Union (UCU) is to take more strike action before the end of September unless the employers agree to return to negotiations. And it will begin preparations for a new ballot to renew the mandate in the pay and conditions dispute.

UCU members overwhelmingly rejected a 5 per cent pay offer in February. A marking and assessment boycott began at 145 universities in April.

The employers have refused not only to improve their offer but even to meet the union. And individual university employers have punitively docked the pay of staff taking part in the action.

The UCU says universities generated more money than ever last year, yet the proportion going to staff fell to a record low. The surplus money could be used to raise pay by 10 per cent, employ properly those

on temporary contracts, address work overload and pay inequality (all demands of the union's broader “Four Fights”).

UCU general secretary Jo Grady said, “We will not be bullied into accepting gig economy universities, nor will we accept employers imposing punitive pay deductions.”

Grady blamed university bosses for the impact on students. “Vice chancellors have decided that crushing their own workers is more important than seeing students graduate after years of hard work. This is a national scandal,” she said.

University managements have tried to use precariously employed staff to break the marking and assessment boycott. Where that has failed they've undermined standards by allowing unmarked work to be graded on the basis of work marked pre-boycott. ■

• A longer version of this article is on the web at www.cpbml.org.uk.

PLASTICS

Polluters exposed

THE SURFERS Against Sewage (SAS) brand audit, a citizen science initiative, has named Coca-Cola, McDonald's and Pepsico as Britain's biggest plastic polluters.

The campaign's volunteers take responsibility for collecting, recording and reporting the pollution uncovered during their Million Mile Clean throughout the year.

Over 4,000 people cleaned up tens of thousands of items of plastic pollution from beaches, rivers and woodlands, and kept plastic out of the ocean.

Coca-Cola produces 3.2 million tonnes of plastic every year. SAS's audits have

crowned them the worst plastic polluter for the fourth year. McDonald's packaging was present in one out of five cleans-ups that took place this year. Pepsi-Co produces 2.5 million tonnes of plastic each year.

SAS's findings highlight the systemic problem Britain faces with plastic and packaging pollution. The root cause is the overproduction and over-consumption of non-essential, single-use, throw-away items, including virgin plastics made from crude oil.

Scientists estimate that the carbon footprint of plastic production is a significant factor in climate change. In 2015, plastics accounted for 4.5 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions – if plastics were a country, it would be the fifth largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world. ■



Triathletes swimming in open water.

Sewage swamps triathlon

AFTER A recent triathlon in Sunderland, 88 people have now reported suffering from diarrhoea and vomiting. The swimming leg of the event, the British leg of the World Triathlon Championship Series, took place in the sea off Roker beach.

After competitors complained that they were swimming in faeces, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) have found 19 of 31 water samples submitted showed norovirus.

Environment Agency testing showed *E. coli* levels 39 times the typical range in samples taken at the end of July. The organisers have written to all competitors to advise them to seek medical advice if they experience any symptoms.

Water companies have tried to excuse the poor quality of water in Britain's rivers and seas by blaming the Victorian sewer system which they inherited at privatisation, a justification repeated by the minister responsible, Therese Coffey.

But the campaigning group Windrush Against Sewage Pollution commissioned research from Professor Peter Hammond, former professor of computational biology at University College London. Hammond found that less than 12 per cent of Britain's sewers were constructed in the Victorian era. Even for that 12 per cent, he found no correlation between the spill rate and the proportion of Victorian sewers.

Spending on wastewater infrastructure has fallen, even as the population has grown, according to Ofwat. Since water was privatised in 1989, with debts written off, water companies, over 70 per cent of which are foreign-owned, have paid out more than £70 billion in dividends. ■

• See also feature article "Muck and money", page 15.

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

SEPTEMBER

Sunday 3 September, 10.30am

Burston, near Diss, Norfolk

Burston Strike School Rally

Celebrating the longest-running strike in British history, lasting from 1914 to 1939. No charge for access. Full details are available from burstonstrikeschool.wordpress.com

Tuesday 12 September 7pm

Online discussion meeting (via Zoom)

"Energy: our future"

Energy is an essential for human survival, for industry. Yet capitalism inflates prices for industrial and home users, and refuses to plan for reliable energy for Britain's future. So workers must. What should such a plan be? Come and discuss. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation.

Tuesday 26 September, 7.30pm

Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

In-person CPBML public meeting

"Our health service, our responsibility"

NHS workers from all professions have shown discipline, tactical ingenuity and unity in their fight for pay and for the future of the service. The whole class, too, must play its part. Come and join the discussion. All welcome.

To keep informed about upcoming CPBML meetings, make sure you're signed up to receive our electronic newsletter (see page 4).

STUDENTS

Universities look abroad

THE RUSSELL Group of universities is now offering more places on courses to international students than to British students. Undergraduate fees have been capped at £9,250 for domestic students since 2017, whereas there is no limit on fees for international students.

It is the staff who maintain standards in the face of relentless adversity. As UCU's general secretary says: "We are fighting not only for fair pay and conditions, but for universities that serve staff, students, and the public good. Employers are disgracing themselves and undermining the entire sector." ■

Housing policy in Britain is in a mess. From missed house mortgage inflation and homelessness, the basic needs of

People need homes, not



John B. Hewitt/shutterstock.com

Protest at Manchester Crown Court against evictions, 2020.

THE GOVERNMENT set itself a target to build 300,000 homes each year, which it has consistently failed to achieve. And it has little consideration for where these will be built other than on greenfield spaces.

The Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) acknowledges a shortfall of 348,462 new homes. Michael Gove, the Levelling Up Secretary, has pledged to hit the targets by the next election. But at the same time as promising this he has made local housing targets advisory and made changes to planning laws that meant that many planned developments have been frozen.

Planning consultancies and developers argue that these changes will result in a

shortfall in England of between 50,000 and 100,000 new homes over the next five years. The changes have affected plans for new homes in both rural and urban areas.

Developers are keen for more profitable greenfield sites to be released, and they will exaggerate the housing need. But neither they nor the government are serving Britain's need for housing.

Relaxing rules?

The government proposes to relax planning rules in the centre of cities to make it easier to convert shops, restaurants and other commercial property into residential accommodation. This seems an attractive way of making use of empty office space

now that working from home has impacted on commercial usage.

But, in reality, the availability of commercial property and the technical issues that can be associated with suitable conversion will do little to decrease the shortfall. It has all the hallmarks of a diversion from the real problems.

Gove has announced the launch of a £24 million planning skills fund to introduce further flexibility around office and shop conversions. It will include the introduction of a "super squad" of planners and other experts to support local areas.

But the DLUHC has handed back £1.9 billion to the Treasury budgeted for 2022-23 because it hasn't been able to spend it.

building targets through to exploitative land deals, people have been neglected...

empty promises

The government says that's because of rising interest rates and uncertainty in the housing market after the pandemic – and don't worry they will spend the money in later years.

The amount handed back included £255 million for new affordable housing and £245 million to improve building safety. It seems that the government willfully refuses to learn the lessons from the Grenfell Tower fire.

Funding for local authority planning departments fell by 55 per cent between 2010 and 2020 according to the National Audit Office. The latest proposals announced by Gove are no more than smoke and mirrors when set against this financial attack on workers. Even property developers say that housing isn't a priority for this government.

The parliamentary LUHC Committee published a report on the new planning proposals. It says that the government has not shown how the policy of scrapping mandatory local housing targets will directly lead to more building of new homes.

Where will they be built?

Indeed planning consultants told the committee that the changes would cut annual housebuilding to around 150,000 units. But this does not address the key questions. Where are houses going to be built? Will they be affordable? Who is going to build them?

It's no good earmarking more farmland and countryside around existing towns and cities and calling it planning. Decisions have to be made about competing land use and how city regeneration schemes can be made to work.

A constructive, planned approach could also provide some relief from the lack of progress in the social housing sector. The damage started under Thatcher in the 1980s with many houses sold off under the Right to Buy scheme, drastically reducing the availability of family homes for rent.

The housing association movement in the 1970s and early 1980s was made responsible for bringing the renovation of a great deal of dilapidated housing, particularly in the inner cities. But many have now

taken on the mantle of quasi-property developers, losing sight of their progressive history and burdened with debt through borrowing.

The government does nothing to discourage this: it wants not more homes at genuinely affordable rents, but "more homes of every kind" – unaffordable for many at market prices, and often built on greenfield sites. While new homes targets are missed, those trying to buy into the existing stock struggle to find enough for a deposit, pay existing mortgages as interest rates increase, or find property in an overheating rental market.

According to the Halifax the average first time buyer needs a deposit of over £62,000 to buy a property. This study found that in 2022 average property values for first time buyers were around 7.6 times the average of UK salaries. That rises to 10 times the average salary in areas of London. As a result, the majority of people are now getting their first mortgages in joint names.

In mid-2022 the Halifax reported that housing availability had fallen to its lowest level on record. The failure to plan is having a direct impact on workers being able to access housing and then pay for it. The report found that, since the start of the pandemic, house prices have risen by 16.8 per cent while earnings had gone up by only 2.7 per cent over the same period.

For those who already have a mortgage, repayments are an increasing burden. The Office of National Statistics looked at the loan to value ratio, the size of the loan relative to the value of the property being purchased. They reported a 61 per cent increase in monthly repayments on a semi-detached property in December 2022 compared to a year earlier. Similar increases were seen on other types of property.

Unaffordable

In December 2021 a loan to value ratio of 75 per cent and a budget of £1,000 per month would enable someone to afford an average semi-detached property in nearly two-thirds of local authorities in Britain. A year later an average semi would be affordable in less than a third of local

'It's no good earmarking more farmland and countryside and calling it planning...'

authority areas.

The story is much the same in the private rented sector. According to HomeLet Rental Index the average rental price for a new tenancy in the UK in July 2023 was £1,243 a month, up by over 10 per cent from last year. The figures for London were far higher, £2,109 a month, an increase of 12.9 per cent.

We need to start planning and re-building to meet increased housing demand from a growing population, changing demographics and inadequate old housing stock. We also need to plan for the supporting infrastructure that is currently inadequate even for the existing population – transport, schools, GPs and so on.

We need a house building programme that prioritises proper planning for people rather than property developers. As a country we need farmland for our self-sufficiency in food production and we need our countryside – as does our wildlife. So relying on profitable greenfield sites isn't the answer.

Increased house building also provides an opportunity to create jobs and develop skills in planning and in the construction industry, including the development of high-quality apprenticeships for young people. There is also an opportunity to source building materials and equipment from British factories, further safeguarding and developing employment and skills.

But this isn't going to happen without us making it happen. The inability, or more to the point, the unwillingness of the government to build new housing within our towns and cities, develop safe and integrated planning and ensure existing housing is affordable is evidence of that. ■

The ruinously expensive rush to meet the net zero target of the government and its Climate Change Committee are determined

The resistible rise of the



Just Jus/shutterstock.com

Whatever the cost, workers must foot the bill. Soaring energy bills have not stopped the net zero dogmatists.

PRIME MINISTER Rishi Sunak has confirmed the government's determination not to allow a public vote on the policy of achieving net zero by 2050. Speaking on ITV on Wednesday 16 August, he claimed there was no need for a vote because "... most people are committed to getting to net zero".

The question has become a hot topic since debate began focusing on the realities of net zero, forced electrification of vehicles, outlawing of new gas and oil boilers and so on.

What prompted many Conservative MPs to express misgivings about the rush to net zero, of course, was the surprise Tory victory over Labour in the recent Uxbridge and South Ruislip by-election, widely regarded as a de facto referendum

on the London Mayor's hated ultra-low emission zone (ULEZ).

That result will give the Labour Party pause for thought also, given their aspiration since the days of Tony Blair to be seen as even "greener" than the Conservatives.

Sunak blithely claims public support for the drive to net zero, but the public has never been asked. The issue has not even been properly debated in parliament.

Image

There have always been politicians who deploy "green" credentials to push their caring image, their concern for the planet. But they struck gold in 2008 with the Climate Change Act and its creation, the Climate Change Committee (CCC).

The establishment of the CCC gave

green fundamentalists a platform, and an increasingly influential one at that. Originally charged with reporting to government on emissions targets, the sway of the CCC has expanded to the point where it trumps other ministries.

The utterances from the CCC are rarely challenged. What passes for debate in parliament is often little more than nodding through successive CCC reports.

Successive governments have been eager to be seen toeing the line on commitments to combat climate change. This is enshrined in the Paris Agreement of 2016, which committed participating countries, 196 of them, to limiting the increase in global average temperatures to less than two degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels.

of 2050 has never been agreed by the public, and the
 mined not to let the people Britain have a say...

net zero dogma

The inclusion of the phrase “pre-industrial levels” in the wording of the Paris agreement signalled a decisive change of direction. Industrialisation officially became the culprit.

Britain contributes less than 1 per cent of global emissions. The reduction in our emissions by virtually 50 per cent since 1990 could have been acclaimed as a small but important contribution. But this was never enough for the CCC zealots and their flag-wavers in government and elsewhere.

Newly emboldened, the CCC now felt it could show its teeth, and in its 2019 report *Net Zero: The UK's Contribution to Stopping Global Warming*, it spelt out the radical change of course it wished to oversee. It included the demand for “changes in the way we farm and use our land to put much more emphasis on carbon sequestration and biomass production, while shifting away from livestock”.

Price to be paid

What has followed lays bare the price to be paid; the net zero dream is revealed as a nightmare. And as the measures demanded are rolled out, public antipathy gives way to anger. People will respond positively to a poll asking if they are in favour of a cleaner, less polluted world. But when the promised land sees them poorer, colder, and hungrier, it becomes a less inviting prospect.

To disguise this bowl of gruel as a feast, the CCC had to distort the cost of net zero. First of all they reckoned a price of somewhere between 1 and 2 per cent of GDP annually, between £22 billion and £44 billion as the cost of implementation of their de-carbonising of the economy. But when the basis of their predictions was examined, it transpired it was all based on the

‘The issue has not even been properly debated in parliament...’

£8,000 to replace a boiler

AS AN example of how the Climate Change Committee’s targets fail to mesh with reality, consider how our homes are to be heated. To achieve its target of decommissioning gas boilers, the committee advises they be replaced by heat pumps. It further calculates that 600,000 of these devices will need to be installed every year for the next five years.

Leaving aside the question of whether there are enough engineers to accomplish this and how many properties are suitable, the upfront costs are eye-watering. Compared to a replacement gas boiler (between £1,000 and £3,000), an air source heat pump can cost between £8,000 and £14,000 to buy and have installed, with ground source heat pumps coming in at anywhere between £28,000 and £49,000.

Should you be one of the households who can contemplate this level of expense, the government’s Boiler Upgrade Scheme will offer a £5,000 grant, set to run until 2025. Unfortunately the funding for this programme runs out once 90,000 boilers have been replaced.

Aside from cost other factors contributing to a reluctance to switch are noisiness (air source heat pumps, the only choice for people living without adjoining land), and the additional cost of upgrading insulation and radiator systems. Subsequent savings on heating bills cannot be guaranteed.

The government says it expects huge demand will bring down the price of heat pumps eventually, but there’s no hard evidence for that belief and it won’t do much for ancillary installation costs. ■

assumption that net zero had arrived.

They were factoring the maintenance of net zero, not the enormous cost of getting there. Former Chancellor Phillip Hammond, known, if for nothing else, for his attention to figures, declared at the time that the costs were closer to £1 trillion. He has not been persuaded to alter his view.

He was reported in the *Daily Telegraph* on 29 July 2023 as accusing successive Conservative prime ministers of being “systematically dishonest” about the true costs of achieving net zero. He went on to complain of a “cross-party disease” of politicians hiding the true cost and consequences including an inevitable impact on living standards.

Among the distortions have been the deception that renewable sources such as wind and solar are cheaper than fossil fuel. The carbon-heavy costs of manufacture, distribution and maintenance, and the rarely acknowledged subsidies, are airbrushed out of the publicity. But the disquiet of people facing the despoiling of cherished landscapes with hundreds of acres of solar panels and mile upon mile of turbines is very real. Not to mention the

frequent loss of good farming land.

The CCC and its apologists think of themselves as above challenge – meting out pain and suffering as the price to pay for observing their act of faith like a latter-day Inquisition. Their rise has been entirely at the expense of democratic accountability, and must be challenged.

Sunak and his prospective successors will have to find a way out of this minefield. He speaks of “...bringing people along with us on the journey [to net zero], and not burdening them with extra hassle or extra cost as we do it”.

This may well prove to be the fig leaf for a gradual detachment from the crippling price the CCC seeks to extract. A relaxation of the timetable imposed would be a step forward, as would commitment to investing in future-facing industries such as domestic battery production.

Above all, dithering and obstruction over modernising our nuclear estate must end. As a first step, Rolls Royce should be given the green light to develop their modular nuclear reactor capabilities as a concrete contribution to the environment and Britain’s energy security. ■

More places need to be created to train medical staff for the NHS workforce ignores one crucial question: how to recruit

Recruitment without retention

IT WOULD be easy to be cynical about the publication, on 30 June 2023, of the NHS England's Long Term Workforce Plan. For a start, it was commissioned by the government and its publication date had long been delayed. Has it finally been published by a government not expecting to win the next election and therefore not expecting to be held accountable for any of its targets?

On top of that, what on earth can be expected of a workforce plan which cannot address a major factor in the haemorrhaging of existing staff – pay?

And there are other problems, notably that it is an England-only plan when the NHS workforce clearly needs a Britain-wide plan. It is too narrow on other issues too: for example, it only looks at NHS staff – even though the plan acknowledges that improving nursing staff recruitment to the NHS could deplete the social care workforce, which then impacts health care outside the NHS.

Downhill

Nor is it the NHS's first long-term plan. The last one was published in 2019, and since then the situation has gone downhill. As the Health Foundation showed in April, the proportion of NHS staff leaving leapt from 9.6 per cent in 2020 to 12.5 per cent in the year to September 2022.

So a plan is a plan, not a promise or a guarantee. But for all that, a workforce plan is something that the NHS needs. Whatever its limitations, it is something workers must understand and use to their advantage. It is, after all, a plan with new funding attached, and unless we as workers are planning a future, we have given up.

The plan was devised in conjunction

‘An admission: the NHS is “particularly reliant” on foreign staff...’



Monkey Butler Images/shutterstock.com

Doctors make their point during a demonstration in London, June 2023.

with sixteen royal colleges, professional bodies, trade unions, patients' organisations, education providers and regulators. What matters now is how they choose to use it. Workers controlling entry to their profession and caring for new entrants is a concrete example of workers running a part of society, and always has revolutionary potential.

The plan contains useful baseline data showing that Britain sits below the OECD average for the number of practising doctors as a proportion of the population and we have fewer GPs per 1,000 population than most other OECD countries.

It also shows that Britain has (per 1,000 population) fewer than half the number of practising nurses of Norway and Switzerland, while countries like Germany and Australia have 39 and 41 per cent

more nurses respectively

NHS data shows a reliance on temporary staffing in the NHS in 2021–22, which is estimated to have been approximately 150,000 full time equivalent staff. The plan uses this as its starting point to argue that domestic education and training will need to increase between 50 and 65 per cent from 2022 to 2030–31. That is an indication of the scale of the problem.

There are also a number of taboos broken, with statements that highlight how relying on overseas recruitment is a weakness in the NHS and an admission that many well qualified home-grown applicants are denied places at medical schools.

Unethical

The plan falls short of saying that recruitment of overseas staff to the NHS is unethical.

the NHS, but the latest plan to address the shortages in retain staff in the face of low pay and poor conditions...

Attention won't save the NHS



Remember, in 2022 the government re-imposed its cap on the number of British medical students it would support after lifting it in 2020 and 2021 in the wake of the pandemic.

As *Workers* reported in January this year, a new medical school, Three Counties, based in Worcester, had been told by the Department for Health and Social Care that no British students would be supported, although it could recruit overseas students. This followed similar limitations on home students at Brunel and Chester universities.

At the time cancer specialist Karel Sikora told *The Times*, “It is heartbreaking that we are having to turn away bright British students with straight As who want to be doctors.”

The plan estimates that medical school places need to be increased by 60 to 100 per cent, providing 12,000–15,000 places by 2030–31 to address the NHS shortfall. It argues that this can be delivered by expanding existing medical schools and establishing new ones, and by introducing medical degree apprenticeships.

Ambitious

The scale of expansion set out will require close working with medical schools, higher education institutes and the further education sector. This is a hugely ambitious target and if the funding is not secured for home students by an incoming govern-

ment, then universities will be only too happy to revert to current practice and use the new facilities for more lucrative overseas students.

Commenting on the training plan the British Medical Association, representing doctors, said, “Too many lofty plans from previous governments have ended up just being aspirations, and we cannot allow this to happen again.”

Each section on training new staff does have a corresponding section on what can be done to retain existing staff but the difficulty here is that the question of pay was not allowed to be part of the remit of the workforce plan. The elephant in the room.

As the British Medical Association says, “Training new doctors will be to no avail if they don’t stay in the workforce...This plan is set up to fail if doctors’ pay continues to be eroded...”

Equally ambitious targets are set with a plan to increase nursing training places, increasing the number of nursing graduates by more than a third over the next five years, accompanied by a 40 per cent rise in nursing associate training places over the same period.

But it won’t be easy. Unlike medicine, where significant numbers of well qualified students don’t get an opportunity to study, many applicants for nursing degrees do not meet the qualification requirements. So the

Continued on page 14

ical given the worldwide shortage of health-care staff. But – finally – here is an official document that admits that the NHS is “particularly reliant” on overseas staff, with the total proportion of NHS workers having non-British nationality (across all professions) now over 17 per cent.

But it does accept that overseas recruitment cannot be the solution. Covid-19, it acknowledges, demonstrated that “A heavy reliance on overseas staff leaves the NHS exposed to future global shocks and fluctuations.” Quite.

For each profession, the plan sets out a bespoke approach to optimise domestic supply by detailing expansions to entry routes and increasing training and education to meet demand. This marks a significant departure from the government cap on home medical student numbers.

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist’s series of Zoom discussion meetings continues on Tuesday 12 September on the subject of energy. All meeting details are published on What’s On, page 5, in our eNewsletter, and at cpbml.org.uk/events.

M As well as our Zoom discussion meetings, we hold regular in-person public meetings, with the next on 26 September in London (details on page 5), as well as informal meetings with interested workers and study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further.

M If you are interested we want to hear from you. Call us on 07308 979 308 or send an email to info@cpbml.org.uk

Continued from page 13



nursing target may prove elusive even if funding for training is available, and will require investment in further education funding to help applicants achieve skills in maths and English.

Interlinked

As with medicine, the problems of training and recruitment are interlinked – the current shortage of qualified nurses means there is already a shortage of those supervising

students in the practice element of their course.

Interestingly, the document does dare to suggest that Britain should break away from the European model of nurse education as specified in an EU directive whereby all EU nursing programmes must entail 2,300 academic hours and 2,300 practice hours. For years, nurse educators and students have been arguing that it is the quality of the learning rather than the hours spent that matter.

Many countries around the world achieve as good or better outcomes without adherence to the EU directive formula. One of these is the Philippines, and the irony is that the NHS has been happy to employ many Filipino nurses.

The plan states that NHS England will work with the Nursing and Midwifery Council “on its welcomed commitment to explore the potential for further changes to nursing degrees. To train staff more flexibly, taking into account the opportunities presented by EU exit...” and notes that this

will “reduce pressure on our learners while significantly increasing placement capacity across the NHS.”

The reality is that NMC changes tend to come about very slowly, and it will be a miracle if this change is in place by September 2026. So the frustration here is another example of a Brexit benefit which may not be realised until a full ten years after our EU exit.

Retention

As in medicine the challenge for all the NHS professions whether staff can be retained. For nursing the lack of financial and other support means nearly one in four do not even complete training.

Sara Gorton, Head of Health at Unison, spoke for many: “At long last there is a plan. Now everyone committed to making the NHS thrive again can focus on the challenge of filling the huge gaps in the workforce.” Her suggestion for step one was that “Action on retention is key... pay must lie at the heart of any solution.” ■

Planning for the wider healthcare team

MODERN HEALTHCARE is entirely reliant on teamwork. And the Long Term Workforce Plan does aim to be comprehensive. It sets targets for recruitment to roles in pharmacy, dentistry, allied health professions, psychological services and healthcare scientists.

Healthcare scientists, for example, provide the scientific backbone of the NHS as their work underpins 80 per cent of all diagnoses. They also support high-quality research and are important for technological innovation.

Recent discussions about artificial intelligence in health care are a reminder that staff will need to be trained for roles which did not exist five years ago.

The ambition set out in this Plan is to increase training places for healthcare scientists by 32 per cent to over 1,000 places by 2031–32. That might seem like a small number compared with the tens of thousands of training places needed in

nursing (and may be one of the reasons for some of the current delays in diagnosis and other aspects of care). But an expansion of a third will be hard to achieve, given that young people with science qualifications will be in demand from other sectors.

The plan discusses increasing apprentice training routes for all healthcare roles. This makes more sense for some kinds of jobs than others, but even so no one knows how well apprentice training will work.

Commenting on this suggestion for medicine the British Medical Association said, “Approaches such as medical apprenticeships and accelerated degrees are also untested, so we have concerns about their role in addressing the crisis.”

And for many staff already employed in healthcare support worker roles, gaining a higher qualification while continuing to earn a salary could be a much more

logical route than taking on student debt.

But in nursing, apprenticeships might well prove valuable. The Plan points to emerging evidence showing that “apprentices are less likely to leave training compared to those in traditional undergraduate training programmes”.

Drop-out rates for all current cohorts of the registered nurse degree apprenticeship programmes are 4 per cent, as against over 15 per cent for traditional nursing undergraduate and postgraduate courses, the plan notes.

That is not in itself any kind of reflection on the type of training. But it is a clear indication that addressing student finance – and scrapping fees for trainee nurses – needs to be the first point in the NHS’s retention strategy. It would go a long way towards ensuring that students can afford to continue studying and don’t leave before they have even begun their careers in the service. ■

Britain's regulators are supposed to provide safeguards for the public. Their record is woeful...

Muck and money



Protesting against dirty water.

‘The companies trot out the usual excuses...’

climate change.

Water companies are failing on other counts too. No new reservoir has been built since 1991, though the population has grown by 10 million since then. Rationing by hosepipe bans and water meters shows that the water companies are organisations for syphoning money from customers rather than utilities for serving public need.

The water industry was privatised in 1989, part of Thatcher's wave of privatisations. The sell-off of national assets was trumpeted as a way of increasing efficiency, properly regulating the industries and increasing share ownership in society.

What's happened with water since then shows those were all lies. Handed over to private capital debt free, 70 per cent of England's water companies are owned by international investment banks and companies operating out of tax havens.

And where is the regulator? The failure of Ofwat even to enforce its legal requirements obliged the House of Lords Industry and Regulators Committee to investigate. Its report, *The affluent and the effluent*, details Ofwat's failure to stop environmental pollution and ensure investment in infrastructure. One of its recommendations is that government give Ofwat guidance on how to regulate!

Ofwat's response was limited to "calling out" the worst performing water companies last year. Unsurprisingly that made little difference. Ofwat's idea of regulation is to fine the company, which is then passed on to the customer through their bills.

Water companies should be held to account. Campaigners like Peter Hammond and musician Feargal Sharkey provide evidence daily. Now it's time for heavy fines not passed on to customers, and substantial prison terms for directors whose decisions carry out this legalised piracy. ■

BRITAIN HAS many regulators – bodies appointed to oversee the working of an industry or an aspect of the economy. They are supposed to provide safeguards, independent of the businesses or organisations directly involved.

Many were created to provide a fig leaf for the 1980s privatisations – asset-stripping on a grand scale. Their record has been woeful – most notably Ofwat. The stink of its failure is hard to ignore.

In the face of growing outrage over the continuing release of untreated waste into rivers and seas, England's water companies have announced a £10 billion investment programme. But they will finance this out of price rises to the customer.

The licence from Ofwat to operate stipulates how much each company must set aside from profits to fund repairs and infrastructure work. But the money has found its way into the pockets of shareholders and company directors by way of dividends. Customers are effectively paying twice for the same thing.

The release of raw sewage was originally permitted as a relief valve to prevent treatment works being overwhelmed during exceptionally wet weather. Yet it is now

commonplace, even in dry weather. The impact on people's health and well-being is evident – swimming and other water based activities curtailed in rivers, beaches closed, wildlife threatened.

Take Yorkshire Water. *The Guardian* published a report in May about sewage discharge in the river Nidd in North Yorkshire in 2020. Peter Hammond, a retired professor, monitored releases at four treatment works. The equivalent of 317 Olympic swimming pools of raw sewage was discharged in that one year.

Arrogance

The company's arrogant response was that perceptions about river pollution were partly down to "...a change in expectations from residents", suggesting that people are unnecessarily fussier than we used to be – and a denial of their experience.

The water companies trot out the usual excuses. Failures of Victorian pipework is one. That won't wash – just under 12 per cent of the network is that old. And according to a report in the *Financial Times* on 13 August, again based on Peter Hammond's work, 80 per cent of sewage spills are down to lack of capacity – not weather or

Workers

Are mayors the wise men who should lead today's education? To meet the need to dig deeper to find the real power in London, look

Who should run London?



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City Hall, London (far left). But the real power lies across the Thames, in the City.

BY 1889 London was an important centre of industry and production. The London County Council (LCC) was born – the first local authority to be directly elected by the people – covering the area known today as Inner London. It was geared to industry in its origins and purpose.

Under a chairman and innumerable committees and subcommittees – no mayor needed – the LCC set itself to meet some fundamental demands of the working class. That included: improved education, electrification of tramways and expansion of the underground railway as well as com-

batting river pollution, overcrowding and slum housing. This entailed development of a suburban commuter belt, compulsory purchase of land for council housing, setting housing standards and so on.

In 1986 prime minister Margaret Thatcher abolished the Greater London Council, successor to the LCC. At a stroke the London boroughs lost their collective grip over policy and resources. By then power had shifted in London. Something fundamentally more malign was at work than Thatcher's hatred of a Labour-led GLC – and it involved the City and the EU.

In the final years of the GLC, London had been given over to finance capital – it was no longer a major industrial city. Factories were closed down. British companies were swallowed up by multinational consortiums. State aid for industry was in effect barred under EU rules.

Offshore

This all suited the new globalist offshore regime. The lifting of exchange controls by Thatcher in 1979 had meant they could get their hands on British capital.

Long-term public debt as a means of funding was just what finance capital

wanted – privatisation, public-private partnerships, private finance initiatives and so on. These mirages had also captured Labour thinking by the end of the 1990s.

Tony Blair and the Labour Party had their eyes on a self-important mayoralty for London, such as they had seen in European towns. The referendum in 2000 for a London Mayor was decided on a 34 per cent turnout. Voters were decidedly underwhelmed. Blair rigged the direct election for Mayor by handing a third of the votes to MPs and MEPs.

Identity politics

And what people now call identity politics – the elevation of minorities over the majority – had also bewitched the trade unions and the new mayor and former GLC leader, Ken Livingstone. Multiculturalism became a divisive issue under Livingstone. He encouraged skyscrapers, and invited foreign billionaires to buy up London property, evading growing concerns over London's economic base.

The fight had not gone out of railway workers, who tried to control the way upgrading the Underground was financed. The proposed Public-Private Partnership

'What people now call identity politics had bewitched the unions and the new mayor...'

ed population? Or are they surplus to requirements? We at the role of the City, its financial sector...



carried a heavy cost – due to favourable terms for the private partners – and risked safety. The RMT and Aslef unions went on strike, perhaps the first attempt to take control of the industry.

Ultimately the Courts endorsed PPP funding, and by 2003 the Underground was privatised. But the unions were proved right when the Metronet consortium collapsed and the government had to step in.

Meanwhile the government was losing control of immigration. A population explosion added to the problems of traffic control, overcrowding, class sizes and access to GPs.

The present mayor and head of the Greater London Authority, Sadiq Khan, professes to run London, but on whose behalf?

Over a million people in London rent from private landlords. Rents are expensive and the accommodation is often inadequate. And people without a home are obviously among those with the greatest housing need. But the first three months of this year saw the smallest number of completed new homes since 2014.

The more families in need come to live in London, the harder it gets for Londoners

already on waiting lists. Taking forecast immigration into account, London's population is predicted to grow from 9.6 million today to around 10.8 million by 2041.

Khan is happy with that scenario. He sees his powers extending to the Wider South East region with a population of over 24 million.

Individual London boroughs have more responsibilities than the present day GLA. But since 2010 central government, bowing to finance capitalism, has cut council funding by 40 per cent in real terms. One after another, boroughs such as Croydon, Thurrock and Slough are declaring themselves bankrupt to compete for government bailouts – accumulating debt to prop up day-to-day spending.

This is a corrupt trend – operating in cahoots with developers and without consultation – using council tax revenue to build hotels, shopping centres and tower blocks. Ignoring height restrictions and affordable homes targets, they demolish and waste perfectly good existing buildings, and call it regeneration.

Campaigns

Local campaigns such as those against the ULEZ, or to save open spaces, may not have the obvious political potential of widespread workplace struggle. Nor are they always correct. But they embody a refusal to be dictated to – a healthy alternative to passive complaining.

New grass roots organisations are springing up, putting landlords, land owners, borough councils, mayors and assemblies to the test. Participation is key to taking power. But political structures are undemocratic: people cannot decide local priorities and mandate their councillors.

All local government is based on the parliamentary model, the social democratic one, forcing us to accept capitalism, which decides whether London will live or die. It obscures the true system of international finance capital, the real driver of central and local government policy.

We should rid ourselves of the idea that the City of London and its clutch of banks and financial institutions is at all beneficial to workers. Its influence is running London into the ground.

We should deny finance capital the

‘International finance capital is the real driver of central and local government policy...’

“square mile” (actually far more) it squats on, and put it to productive use. Take back control of the exchange system and invest for the people's needs, for education and training. End the waste of human capital.

Could workers run London? They have proved they are capable of a high degree of organisation. They don't need establishment figures, parliamentary or trade union, to lend an air of respectability to their deliberations. Just look at what workers have achieved in and around London.

Skilled workers have constructed great infrastructure projects – the Channel Tunnel, the Elizabeth Line, the new Thames Tideway Sewer. The High Speed Railway from London to the North was to be another. But the failure of capitalism has put a halt to that, resulting in a 50-acre abandoned building site around Euston.

London is home to some of the greatest teaching hospitals in the world. A new generation of nurses, backed by doctors and consultants, and the public, has taken steps to assert the value of their profession and to save the NHS.

Physiotherapists, ambulance workers, rail staff, teachers, lawyers, airport security and immigration staff, and Amazon delivery workers have all taken action recently. They have taken responsibility not just for improving pay, but for the trades, industries and professions that make up the capital. If a mass desire to overthrow the finance system is added, workers will really be fighting to run London in their class interest. ■

• This article is based on a CPBML public meeting in London in June. A longer version is available online.

There is much to learn from the Covid-19 pandemic, but w
 Official inquiries take ages, cost millions, and rarely come

The pandemic inquiry s



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Althorne recreation park, Essex: no dogs – and no children either. Children and young people had their social lives devastated by a disease that posed only a tiny direct threat to them. The inquiry will look into this and other health inequalities.

AT LEAST 200,000 people have died in Britain of Covid-19. Calls for an inquiry into the pandemic began during the pandemic itself, supported by opposition politicians, some trade unions and some of the great and good of the medical establishment.

There was no single purpose behind these calls. Some people wanted to apportion blame for failures or believed from experience that the response could have been far better. Others, more cynically, saw it merely as a way of further embarrassing the government.

An inquiry chair was appointed late in 2021, terms of reference finalised by June 2022, and the Inquiry began hearing evidence in June 2023. Notably absent in the proceedings so far is the voice of those workers who found ways to deal with the impact – in health and beyond.

Official inquiries are a poor tool for finding out truth, or learning lessons, in a timely manner. The Grenfell fire inquiry started in 2017; it has yet to report. The Chilcot inquiry into the invasion of Iraq published its report 13 years after the event. And the Bloody Sunday inquiry finally reported 38 years after the 1972 massacre in Derry. Many potential witnesses were by then dead, others no longer fit to recall events and give evidence.

Years and years

The UK Covid-19 Inquiry, known as the Hallett inquiry after its chair, the former appeal judge Heather Hallett, is not expected to give its first report until the summer of 2024 at the earliest. The inquiry will sit until at least 2026, and has divided its work into six modules, with more to be

announced. The hearings so far form part of the first module, on Resilience and Preparedness.

The modules to follow are on: core UK decision-making and political governance (divided into four, the UK as a whole, with Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland each to be considered separately); the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on healthcare systems; vaccines and therapeutics; government procurement; and last of all the care sector.

The inquiry will consider further issues including testing and tracing and the government's business and financial responses. It will also look at health inequalities; education, children and young persons, and other public services, including frontline delivery by key workers.

Scotland is included in the inquiry, with

...ve should not look to the Hallett inquiry for the lessons.
... up with the goods...

... should listen to workers

dedicated hearings for Scottish issues. Typically the SNP has decided to set up a rival version, the Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry. Set up in 2021, it has yet to hold any public hearings apart from a briefing on epidemiology.

Already the UK Inquiry website hosts 627 documents. The costs of the inquiry are spiralling, not least because of the large numbers of lawyers employed by the government and other “core participants”. Every government department involved has its own lawyers. And the inquiry itself has 62 barristers including 12 King’s Counsel.

Soaring costs

The Times reported in June that the Inquiry had already cost £100 million and is predicted to cost more than double that by the time it has concluded.

Yet thanks to parliamentary privilege some relevant material, for example a National Audit Office report, cannot even be discussed. The counsel to the inquiry states that it is not permissible to use parliamentary material as evidence for or against disputed factual matters, or even to challenge it.

What have we learnt from the hearings so far? That government plans for a pandemic were extraordinarily complicated. The hearing was shown an organogram for pandemic preparedness and response structures in the UK and England, described as a “bowl of spaghetti” by one witness.

As hearings proceeded, there was a distinct contrast between evidence given

by scientists and clinicians and those of politician witnesses. Media attention predictably centred on the politicians, who were inevitably keen to shift blame away from themselves.

Separatist politicians in Scotland and Wales spent the pandemic jockeying for position and trying to present themselves as better than the UK government. But it has become clear they were as ill-prepared as England and the UK central government. Scotland went unrepresented at the UK-wide Resilience Forum meetings.

The lessons of recent pandemic threats had not been absorbed, in particular from Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2002-2004 or Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2012 – both caused by a species of coronavirus.

Public health and infectious disease specialists noted the run-down of the public health service. The Health and Social Care Act of 2012 had set up Public Health England, and transferred many public health responsibilities out of the NHS to local government, which was struggling to even fulfil existing responsibilities.

Budget cuts

The budget for Public Health England was cut by 40 per cent in real terms between 2013 and 2021, when it was disbanded and replaced with the UK Health Security Agency.

Pathogens which cause serious epidemic and pandemic diseases change over time. What kind of preparedness is relevant to best cope?

‘Separatist politicians were as ill-prepared as England and the UK central government...’

Most important is that the workers, the real experts in those areas, ensure that Britain’s scientific and pharmaceutical industries are in a fit state to respond quickly as new threats emerge.

Those of us who work in the NHS are central, but the inquiry is unlikely to say anything meaningful about improving NHS pay and staffing levels, nor should we expect it to. Those questions will be resolved in struggle.

The pandemic was tamed by the expertise of British workers: in vaccine development; in caring for the sick; in keeping the country fed; and in getting workers to work.

By contrast, those calling for perpetual lockdown, and certain trade unionists keen to keep their members away from work, serve no one. We are still living with the long term consequences of the pandemic, in education as much as health. Workers will have to deal with that too in time. ■



CPBML public meeting

**Tuesday 26 September, 7.30 pm
Bertrand Russell Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion
Square, London WC1 4RL**

“Our health service, our responsibility”

NHS workers from all professions have shown discipline, tactical ingenuity and unity in their fight for pay and for the future of the service. The whole class, too, must play its part. Come and discuss. All welcome.

Workers

An analysis of finance capital forensically analyses its failing... see that there is no turning back to a golden age. Finance c

How finance capital hold



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the problem of finance capitalism and the rentier legacy of feudalism would still leave the class conflict of industrial capitalism in place [and]...would not solve the problem of exploitation of labor by its employers.”

But he argues that creating a capitalist economy free of rentier burdens must happen before the conflict between capitalists and worker can be “reformed”. For all his detailed insight, Hudson can’t see that what he is describing is the evolution of finance capitalism, not a hangover from feudalism.

And worse, Hudson is in denial that the class conflict in each country between the capitalist class and the working class is unavoidable and cannot be set aside until the right time. Consequently he can’t accept the need is for revolutionary change to end the rule of capital.

Failure

Reform or mitigation of capitalism has failed at every stage. The book details how austerity policies go hand-in-hand with free trade and debt deflation policies; they are the policies of finance capitalism. These shrink productive powers, and spur higher unemployment and emigration.

Under such policies, “public spending is counted as overhead – as if infrastructure investment, education and health and social services do not play a productive economic role but merely absorb taxes...on the ground that they do not themselves make a profit, as if that means they do not contribute to the economy’s overall surplus.”

Finance capital defends free trade policies claiming that cheaper imports mean a better life for wage earners: “The trick is to try and make wage earners think of themselves as consumers, not workers, so that they will not ask what the benefit is in lower consumer prices if their job has been offshored.”

Finance capital transcends national boundaries. Multinational corporations undermine the sovereignty of nations and their ability to control movements of capital, labour, goods and services across borders.

These corporations want the opposite, for their own competitive advantage. The powers of national governments inevitably conflict with the corporations’ aims. Calling for open borders bolsters the multinationals

The destiny of civilization: finance capitalism, industrial capitalism, or socialism, by Michael Hudson, paperback, 327 pages, ISBN 978-3949546075, ISLET, 2022, £19.90.

THIS USEFUL book from US economist Michael Hudson exposes the big lies that finance capital’s fans use to try to maintain its destructive and anti-democratic rule.

Hudson takes apart accepted truths economists and politicians use to justify their policies. It’s worth a read to find out in detail how finance capital works – not to recoil in horror, but to counter their arguments.

He explains that neoliberal economics, the current capitalist orthodoxy, stands classical economics on its head. And this is so far-reaching that it influences Chinese and Russian planning as well.

Hudson says that this view of economics “...regards financial charges as income earned productively by providing a ‘service’, which is categorized as output and hence part of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).” Financial profits and other forms of eco-

nomical rent are counted as contributions to production, not as a burden.

The result: an illusion that the economy is growing, “But what actually is growing is the rentier sector, which does not create real economic value, but merely transfers income from debtors, renters and consumers to creditors, landlords and monopolists.”

This imbalance between production and finance is systemic and will not somehow correct itself if left alone. Finance capital is the problem and not the answer. The lack of investment in truly productive activity leads to economic stagnation and cyclical crises.

Bailouts

After causing the 2008 financial crash, “banks threatened with insolvency then asked for a bailout, holding the economy hostage if the government would not save them, along with their bondholders and large depositors.” Finance capital’s tame governments complied with this blackmail, as is now well known.

Hudson claims that there is a way forward for capitalism. He says that “...solving

...s – but then fails to
...capital must go...

s its rule

**‘Reform of
capitalism has
failed at every
stage...’**

and destroys democracy.

George Ball, the USA’s Under Secretary of State for Economic and Agricultural Affairs during the 1960s, summed this up, “to fulfil its full potential the multinational corporation must be able to operate with little regard for...restrictions imposed by individual national governments...”.

Hudson is not fooled by the “nice guys” either. He points out that the Obama Administration was responsible for ensuring that the Trans-Pacific Partnership was not just a trade agreement but became a tool “...to block public regulation of health, the environment, worker and consumer protection, and any other public interest that might interfere with corporate profit grabbing and rent extraction...”.

Hudson focuses largely on the USA and Britain. But he also mentions Russia and China. He says that today’s Russia needs to replace the “rentier kleptocracy” that developed after the Soviet Union fell...” They are in power! Replacing them would take a revolution.

His analysis of China is similar. He suggests that sustained economic growth depends on “...preventing its economy from being taken over by an emerging financial billionaire class.” But China already has an emerging financial billionaire class, which supports a new predatory landlord class.

The conflict between the USA and post-Soviet Russia and China is not ideological as Hudson claims, but is conflict between rival powers at different stages of capitalism.

These shortcomings and Hudson’s misplaced views that in Europe and North America “industrial capitalism seemed to be evolving into socialism” should not detract from the value of his book, which shows throughout how industrial capitalism evolved into finance capitalism. ■

WORKERS

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Launched in 1948, the NHS wasn't given to us by benign p
won by workers fighting over centuries for a health service

How the NHS was won

IN THE wake of the industrial revolution, Britain was transformed from an agrarian, rural nation into an industrial, urban one. Within a short timeframe, people congregated in towns and cities, with an explosion of disease, industrial injuries, and destitution. Poor water supply, drainage and refuse disposal were major contributory causes of cholera outbreaks. Life was grim.

An early success in the battle for quality and affordable healthcare was the foundation of The Keelmen's Hospital of Newcastle in 1701. The men's work was arduous, loading coal from the banks of the shallow rivers Tyne and Wear on to keel boats then unloading them on to ships further out to sea.

Keelmen were rarely able to continue with the work beyond age 40. Families could be devastated, emotionally and financially, by injury or illness. But they were organised. They had to be. After many pay and conditions disputes with the employers, they began a campaign in 1698 for a hospital for their families, funded by each keelman paying a penny a tide. The Newcastle Corporation provided a site for the hospital, and it was completed in 1701.

Initially the employers insisted that they should manage the hospital fund – claiming that it was important that the money wasn't siphoned into strike pay! That didn't stop the keelmen and their families. They fought to wrest control of the management of the hospital from their employers – and they succeeded. The hospital continued until the demise of the job of keelman in the late 1800s.

A more recent example, still in existence in 1948, was the Tredegar Workmen's Medical Aid and Sick Relief

Fund first launched by miners and other organised workers through their unions in 1890. Workers paid a regular subscription for medical care for them and their families.

Like the keelmen of the previous century, they campaigned for a hospital. And when that was built in 1904, they didn't sit back. Instead, they fought to ensure they had control of the hospital and fund management.

By the 1930s the scheme was providing almost all Tredegar's people with healthcare.

The National Insurance Act of 1911 introduced a compulsory system of contributory health insurance for a major section of the manual workforce. Over 11 million workers were covered at the outset, rising to 20 million (43 per cent of the population) by 1938.

In addition to a weekly receipt of sickness benefit, members and their families were eligible for "adequate" medical attendance and treatment, without further payment, from their chosen "panel" doctor. By 1938, 90 per cent of all active general practitioners were involved in the scheme. Hospital treatment was excluded, except for tuberculosis.

Varying standards

The standard of "adequate" medical treatment varied. A GP, writing of his experiences before the second world war, recalled the waiting room with rows of seats for about 60 patients who sat facing a high bench. Behind stood three doctors and, behind them, the dispenser. The doctor called the next patient to come forward. Having listened to the complaint, he turned to the dispenser to order the appropriate remedy. There was rarely any attempt at examination.

Voluntary hospitals, aimed at the "sick poor", provided the bulk of emergency care and relied largely on charity. They were staffed by physicians and surgeons who donated their time and expertise while making a living from their private practice.

Municipal hospitals, a vestige of the old workhouse hospitals (created under the Poor Laws of the Tudor times onwards), were run by local authorities.

But by the 1930s hospitals across the



Workers

Postbox outside St Thomas's Hospital, London.

country were facing financial crisis and growing waiting lists.

The wartime period led to the creation of the Emergency Hospital Service to care for the wounded, when the government was forced to recognise that the existing services could not cope with war casualties. This new service created about 65,000 extra hospital beds; surgical and other hospital facilities were upgraded, and specialised treatment centres were developed.

By 1941, the Ministry of Health was developing a post-war health policy with the aim that services would be available to the entire population. A year later the Beveridge Report recommended that the government create "comprehensive health and rehabilitation services".

Given the strong public support for the Report, it was eventually supported across the House of Commons.

In 1944 the government endorsed a White Paper which set out the guidelines for the NHS. This was to be funded from

'Reorganisations, mismanagement and underfunding have always been part of the NHS...'

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e for all. ...



general taxation not national insurance. Everyone was entitled to treatment, provided free at the point of delivery.

But great as that achievement was, the NHS has never been a fully comprehensive and preventative health system. It acts as a safety net that cannot compensate for bad diet, ignorance, or poor housing.

Reorganisations, mismanagement, and underfunding have been part of NHS history since it was founded – the past ten years have not been exceptional. Prescription charges, introduced by one Conservative government and abolished in 1965 by another, were re-introduced by a Labour government in 1968. And for many a visit to the dentist has become a luxury they cannot afford.

We can learn from our forefathers – the keelmen of Newcastle and the working people of Tredegar – who recognised the need to demand a quality, comprehensive healthcare system and also the need to maintain control of that system. ■

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Britain? Join the CPBML.

ABOUT US

As communists, we stand for an independent, united and self-reliant Britain run by the working class – the vast majority of the population. If that's what you want too, then come and join us.

All our members are thinkers and doers. We work together to advance our class's interests. Every member can contribute to developing our understanding of what we need to do and how to do it.

What do we do? Rooted in our workplaces, communities and trade unions, we use every opportunity to encourage our fellow workers and friends to explore how Marxism can be applied to Britain now. Marx's understanding of capitalism is a powerful tool – the Communist Manifesto of 1848 explains the financial crash of 2007/8.

Either we live in an independent Britain deciding our own future or we become slaves to international capital. Leaving the EU was the first, indispensable step. Now begins the fight for real independence.

We have no paid employees, no millionaire donors. Everything we do, we do ourselves, collectively. That includes producing *Workers*, our free email newsletter, our website, pamphlets and social media feeds.

We distribute *Workers*, leaflets and pamphlets in a variety of ways, such as online or in our workplaces, union meetings, communities, market places, railway stations, football grounds – wherever workers are, that is where we aim to be.

We hold regular public meetings around Britain as well as online meetings, study groups and less formal discussions. Talking to people, face to face, is where we have the greatest impact and – just as importantly – learn from other workers' experience.

So why join the Communist Party? What distinguishes Party members is this: we accept that only Marxist thinking and the organised work that flows from it can transform the working class and Britain. We learn from each other. The real teacher is the fight itself, and in particular the development of ideas and confidence that comes from collective action.

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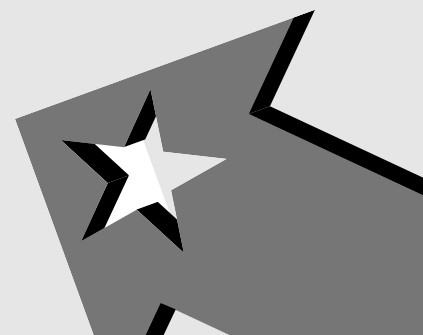
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email info@cpbml.org.uk

twitter [@cpbml](https://twitter.com/cpbml)

www.cpbml.org.uk

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What's next for workers?

'Government and employers seemed unprepared for this upsurge. Maybe they believed their own rhetoric about the lazy, stupid working class...'

THIS YEAR and last many workers have taken up the fight for better pay and conditions. For some, like rail workers, this has been the latest step in long running disputes over the future of their industry as well as pay.

Others, such as health workers, have taken action because they felt they had little choice in the face of steep inflation and negligent employers, with the government pulling the strings in the background.

And it's not just the public sector – all over Britain workers have exercised their strength in the workplace in defence of their standard of living and conditions of employment.

These disputes have in many cases resulted in a degree of success, especially on pay. But even those struggles have for the most part not kept up with inflation – the rising cost of housing, food, energy and transport. Real wages have fallen.

Government and employers seemed unprepared for this upsurge. Maybe a negative view of workers led them to disparage the potential to organise with discipline, ingenuity and flexibility. Or maybe they believed their own rhetoric about the lazy, stupid working class.

Certainly the ruling class and its government underestimated the power of collective thought and action. But they are catching up fast – to be expected: don't count on their continuing ineptitude or underestimate their determination to reassert control.

No worker really thinks that one year's success ends the necessity for future defence of pay. Talk of long-term pay structures and future arrangements is no more than an acknowledgment of the balance of strength – the terms of a truce, not a final resolution.

Yet perpetual, unending strikes are not the answer either. Life must go on, bills paid, respite taken. Continuing action when support for a dispute is waning wastes and dissipates strength for the sake of short-term glory. As if somehow success will be permanent, if only everyone will hang on.

Disputes rarely end neatly in this never-ending, but ebbing and flowing, confrontation between workers and capitalists. Differences

between groups of workers come to the surface again. Some feel they could have achieved more, others that they have lost too much for too little gain. But only those involved can come to a collective decision about settlement or not.

Even with many of those involved being new to industrial action, workers in recent disputes have frequently shown they understand when to take gains and when to call the employer's bluff. Overwhelmingly votes for action have been solid (neutering the aim of anti-union laws).

The government has misjudged the mood of the general public too. They are also workers, and suffering from inflation and poor working conditions. They understand why other workers are fighting for better wages, even if inconvenienced and not themselves in dispute.

Above all, no one is buying the lie that workers' pay rises cause inflation. That's been unavoidably clear, even to ministers. They are now trying the line that they have no choice but to hold down wages otherwise economic prospects will be grim. There is no sign that anyone is swallowing that either.

The number of strikes is at its highest for several years. But that's only part of the story. In the health and transport disputes, and others too, workers are consciously fighting not only for pay, but for the future of their sector. It's a battle for control: to serve the needs of the British people, not the needs of capital.

As with struggles for pay, there are no permanent guarantees for the future of any industry. Success depends even more on ingenuity, solidarity and tactical nous.

Let's reject the blind alleys of waiting for a change of government, or nationalisation. And reject the idea that globalisation and immigration are the answer.

Demands for the future need to start with an analysis of the needs and shortcomings of each sector. What's failing, how can that be overcome, and so on.

Such a lead – even from just one sector – will encourage workers across the whole of Britain to take up the call for an assessment of our national needs. And then the fight for the future can really begin. ■

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